

YORK BOOKS XIX
Continuity Tracts

A LITTLE WINE

1 Tim. 5, 23

CHRISTIANITY AND ALCOHOL

By H. R. GAMBLE

Rector of Upper Chelsea. Preacher at Lincoln's Inn.
Hon. Chaplain to H.M. the King

Second Edition



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“A Little Wine”

Christianity and Alcohol



statements as these.

(1) In the first place let us observe that to regard material things as in themselves evil is to use not Christian, but anti-Christian language. Again and again there have been sects such as the Manicheans which have regarded “matter” as the seat of evil; and in order to escape from its power so far as possible they have taught their disciples to abstain from wine, from flesh, from marriage, and to practise the most rigid “asceticism” in the hope of becoming free from the power of material things. Such sects as these (apart from the fact that they utterly failed to produce a high spiritual life) were always condemned by the Christian Church as fundamentally false and wrong. To the Christian the root of evil lies not in material things but in the perverted will of man.

(2) It is quite untrue to say, as it is sometimes said, that the use of wine is forbidden or condemned by the *Bible*. There is not a word in the *Bible* condemning drink

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as in itself evil. There are many denunciations of drunkenness, but none of drink. In the Old Testament wine is praised as "a source of good cheer to the heavy of heart, as a stimulant to the faint, and as a token of the full happy and prosperous life." (See "Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels," vol. ii, p. 824.) In the New Testament it is regarded as good, and its medical value is recognized (1 Tim. v, 23). Both in the Old and the New Testament drunkenness is severely condemned (*e.g.*, Isaiah, xxviii, 7, Ephesians, v, 18) but not, as we have said, the use of drink. An attempt is sometimes made to divide the wines of the Bible into intoxicating and non-intoxicating beverages, and to maintain that the latter only are permitted; but this view is not supported by the best scholars. "The studies of the names applied to wine show that they are, for the most part, evidently synonyms, and that the substance indicated by them all was one which if used to excess, was liable to cause intoxication. An attempt has been made to obtain a textual support for total abstinence by differentiating intoxicating from unfermented wine in the biblical terminology; but it is only special pleading without adequate foundation." (See Hastings's "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. ii, p. 34.)

(3) In the next place—and this surely is a matter of first concern to Christians—we may refer to the example of our Lord. It is quite clear that he neither taught nor practised abstinence from wine. Here lay the difference between John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. John led for the most part a solitary life. He was "in the desert," his "meat was locusts and wild honey"; but Jesus lived in quite a different fashion. He dwelt among men. He did not disdain to share their pleasures. He attended a great feast in the house of Levi, and "broke bread" with a Pharisee. These things were often brought up against him by his enemies. "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and ye say he hath a devil; the Son of Man is come eating and drinking, and ye say, behold a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber and a friend of publicans and

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sinners! But wisdom is justified of all her children.” (St. Luke, vii, 33, 35.)

We see Our Lord, for instance, at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. “And when they wanted wine his Mother said unto him, they have no wine.” He does not refuse to respond to her appeal—on the contrary he smiles upon the innocent gaiety of the feast; he increases it; he changes the water into wine.

Or again, what could be more significant than that, at the institution of the Eucharist, he should have chosen the common things of life, “bread that strengenth man’s heart,” the “wine that maketh glad the heart of man,” bread and wine, wine as well as bread, to be made the Memorial of his Sacrifice, and the Vehicle of his Grace?

In the face of all these facts, some of the language occasionally employed in pulpits and on platforms seems rather strange. Those who want a religion which forbids the use of wine and all alcoholic liquors can have it: but the religion is not Christianity. It is Mohammedanism. Does anyone seriously maintain that the type of character produced under the influence of Mohammedanism is higher than that developed under the influence of Christianity?

Of course, in laying down these principles—which are so often forgotten or ignored—we are not for a moment condemning or disparaging the noble efforts of those who, in the hope of saving drunkards, have themselves become total abstainers. They have resolved for a certain purpose to resign a lawful indulgence, and in many cases, they would be the last to use the sort of language which we have been deprecating. In the same way we ought to honour those who, “for the Kingdom of Heaven’s sake” have resolved to abstain from marriage and to live a celibate life. But in neither case can they be regarded as setting up a standard for ordinary humanity; nor can those who voluntarily abstain from marriage or alcohol impose a similar rule upon others. These questions must be decided by the taste or judgement of every individual.

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But there are often questions, behind this, which we must help to touch. It may be contended, and it often is contended, that as a matter of fact drunkenness is such a great and crying evil, that it must be dealt with by itself and in a drastic fashion. It may be contended that (even though it may not be sinful to drink in moderation) yet the evils produced by the abuse of strong drink are of such a character that it is the duty of Christians to endeavour to abolish strong drink altogether, and to call in the power of the law to effect such abolition. What are we to say to those who advocate a policy of this description?

(a) In the first place we maintain that they are aiming at the impossible. All experience tells us that it is not possible to “put down drinking” by any action of the State. The only result of such an attempt is to change the manner of it. Those who wish to drink will still do so, but they will drink secretly rather than openly: they will change the public-house for the club or a private drinking den. This is the experience of what are called the “Prohibition States” in America. The law is broken or evaded. Its moral authority is not recognized by men who feel rightly that their personal liberty is being invaded in a manner that is totally unjustifiable; and there are few things more morally injurious to a nation than that the law of the country should be regarded with contempt or that a spirit of lawlessness should be fostered in a people deprived of reasonable freedom.

(b) But, in the next place, even supposing that the aim of the prohibitionist were actually attained in the highest degree, supposing that not only were public-houses put down but that, in some way not at present discernible, all the strong drink in the country were actually destroyed—it does not in the least follow that, from a Christian point of view, there would be any gain. No mere negative reform is of much moral value. Our Lord once warned us of the peril of the “empty house.” One demon is expelled only that seven others worse than the first may enter in and dwell there; “and the last state of that man is worse

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than the first." (St. Luke, xi, 26.) The mere fact that drunkenness has been expelled by force does not necessarily make the man or nation, from which it has been expelled, better than before. Drunkenness is one attempt to satisfy the desire for more life.

"'Tis life whereof our nerves are scant. . . .
More life and fuller that I want."

It is a bad and foolish way; but there are other ways quite as bad, or even worse. Here, for instance, are some words from a paper contributed by Dr. Ernest Almquist, Professor of Hygiene at Stockholm, to the "Hygienischen Rundschau."

"Some persons who leave off alcohol become slaves to other vices which are no better. The greatest danger which threatens the northern people at the present moment is increasing unchastity. In provinces which have experienced a perceptible decline in drunkenness there has been a rapid increase in immorality" (*i.e.* impurity).

This danger will always exist unless we can teach people not only to "abhor that which is evil" but also to "cleave to that which is good." Unless we can satisfy their desires for "more life" by substituting higher pleasures for lower ones, they will always tend to change their vices rather than to abandon them.

(c) And this leads us on to the third and final question. What is the relation of Christianity to Temperance?

To answer this question as briefly as possible let us say that the aim of Christianity is not to work more from *without* but from *within*—not to cultivate temperance or purity as isolated virtues but to produce *men* to whom purity or temperance will be a necessary part of the Christian life. It seeks to touch the source and spring of their motives and conduct. It strives to give them a "clean heart" and a "right spirit," believing that when this is done, all the rest will follow in due order. "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things" and among the "good things" is temperance;

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but it is not the only “good thing.” In other words, Christianity aims at producing *character* and character is the expression of the *whole* man. The danger of cultivating any particular virtue, such as temperance, by itself, is that, when this aim is accomplished, other parts of the man’s nature may be left entirely unchanged. The most common example of this danger, perhaps, is seen in the violent and aggressive teetotaler who often seems to have attained his particular object at the cost of his character as a whole. He is often “lop-sided” and unbalanced.

The aim, then, of Christianity is to produce *men*, free men; it lays stress upon liberty, for without liberty we cannot produce men, though we may make human machines. A distinguished Prelate is reported to have said “Better England free than England sober.” What he meant was that even sobriety could have no moral value unless it was the free choice of the men themselves, not something imposed upon them from without. He meant that even temperance would be dearly bought if it were bought at the cost of character as a whole. Virtues must not be put on like jewels or ornaments; they must flow like streams from the spring and source of the life that is within; and that spring of life must be touched and purified by the Spirit of God. Then life will be free indeed in the highest and truest sense. “Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”

The relation, then, of Christianity to temperance is just the same as its relation to all other virtues. They all have their place; they are all the outcome of the Christian life. Of course in laying stress on this fundamental process of character-making, we do not wish to disparage the value of other than purely religious methods. Education, if it cannot by itself make men better, can make them wiser; if it does not teach the *sin* of drunkenness, it can display its folly. The provision of other amusements and interests will help to save men from seeking “life” in intoxication. Social, educational, religious influences may work together, as indeed they have been doing for many years, with the

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result that public opinion in all classes is now against the drunkard, and that the sobriety of the people as a whole is visibly increasing. But the process if it is to be lasting cannot and will not be very rapid; and if any permanent good is to be achieved, we must treat men and women as free and responsible beings, capable of "self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control."

Note

SINCE this paper was written, the arguments advanced in it have received strong confirmation in a book recently published in America, "Religion and Drink," by Dr. E. A. Wasson, Rector of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Newark, N.Y. In the course of it he shows that the moral and religious condition of the "Prohibition" states, as tested by the number of divorces and the proportion of church-goers to the population, is not better, but worse, than the average for the whole country. Thus the ratio of divorces to marriages from 1887 to 1906 in the three "dry" states of Maine, Kansas, at North Dakota are as follows:

Maine, one divorce to six marriages.

Kansas, one divorce to nine marriages.

North Dakota, one divorce to ten marriages, while, for the whole country, during this period, the ratio of divorces to marriages is one to thirteen and a half.

Tested by the standards of public worship, the "Prohibition" states are also found to be below the average—the old "dry" state of Maine being in fact forty-fourth on the list out of forty-nine.

What is more remarkable still is that, in spite of prohibition, the consumption of drink in the whole country has steadily increased in the last forty-five years, while in Europe, "where there is no prohibition to speak of, drink is decreasing." Even the abler leaders of the Prohibition Party in the country "recognize this anomaly"; and the Rev. Wilbur F. Crafts, in "The Continent" of Chicago, remarks that "countries with little or no prohibition are decisively reducing the national *per capita* consumption of liquors, while the United States, with more prohibition than any other country, has never succeeded in accomplishing much reduction in the nation as a whole, except temporarily in years of financial depression." ("Religion and Drink," p. 219.)

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